

NEWTON LOCAL LANDMARKS PROGRAM

65-71 WALNUT PARK

The Newton Historical Commission, with the assistance of Boston University Preservation Planning student, Joseph Cornish, prepared this landmark report, completed in June 1997.

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THE JOHN C. POTTER ESTATE
65-71 Walnut Park
Newton, MA 02158

Landmark Designation Report
Prepared by Joseph P. W. Cornish, Boston University
For the Newton Historical Commission
May 7, 1997

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The John C. Potter Estate (65-71 Walnut Park) is historically and architecturally significant as an early surviving example of suburban development in Newton during the middle of the nineteenth century. The Second Empire/Victorian house has retained many of its defining features, most important its slate Mansard roof. This property is associated with the Jackson family, early settlers of Newton; Alexander Wadsworth, the famed Boston landscape planner and engineer; John C. Potter, a Boston Merchant; Joseph Flangan, a wealthy Boston stockbroker; and the Sisters of St. Joseph, who currently occupy the building as a convent.

I. Name of Property

A. Historic Name

Historically 65-71 Walnut Park has most often been referred to as the Potter Estate. The House was owned by John C. Potter and his family between 1862 and 1893. It is this name that this report will use to refer to the property.

B. Common Name

This property is also known as the Convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph, its present use. In addition 65-71 Walnut Park has sometimes been referred to as the Joseph Flanagan Estate, for Joseph Flanagan who occupied the house between 1893-1921.

II. Location

The Potter Estate is located at 65-71 Walnut Park in Newton, Zip Code 02158. On the assessors map it is located at section 12, block 003, lot 0004.

III. Classification

A. Ownership of Property

The ownership of the property is private. It is owned and used as a convent by:

The Sisters of St. Joseph
637 Cambridge Street
Brighton, MA 02135-2801
(617)783-3635

B. Type of Property

The type of primary resource on the property includes: 1 Mansion, 1 Caretaker's House, 1 Barn, Historic Landscape/Neighborhood Setting. Walnut Park along with nearby Waban Park, are surviving examples of mid-nineteenth century planned suburban developments in Newton.

C. National Register Status

The Potter Estate was listed on National Register of Historic Places on May 20, 1981 (#81000116), and the State Register of Historic Places.

IV. Function or Use

A. Historic Function

The historic function of this property was a private, suburban estate.

B. Current Function

Since 1921 this property has been a convent for Catholic nuns. Today 65-71 Walnut Park is zoned as MR1 (Multi-Residential). This parcel is subject to regulations set forth in The City of Newton's Zoning Ordinance, Section 30-9. Properties zoned MR1 have a FAR of .45, are limited to a maximum of 30% total lot coverage, and a 50% minimum of open space. New construction cannot exceed 36 feet and can be no more than 3 stories without a zoning variance. This property has been assessed at a value of \$15,839,400, which includes the convent, the caretaker's cottage, barn, 531,429 square feet of land, and three other buildings which belong to Aquinas College. Aquinas College is adjacent to the convent, which has been combined onto the same parcel by the Newton Assessor's office.

V. Description

A. Neighborhood

65-71 Walnut Park, the former Potter Estate that is today a convent for the Sisters of St. Joseph, is an important landmark in the City of Newton. This property was originally part of the land owned by John Jackson, the first permanent settler of Newton. In anticipation of Newton becoming an important suburb of the City of Boston in the 1840s, William Jackson hired landscape planner and engineer Alexander Wadsworth to design a portion of his property for residential, suburban development. These areas became known as Waban Park and Walnut Park. Wadsworth who lived from 1806-1898 was very well known in the Boston area during this time, as he designed Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge with Henry Dearborn. Wadsworth designed many picturesque and residential parks in the Boston area in the nineteenth century, including Kenrick Park and Auburn Park in Newton.

The properties surrounding Walnut Park, including the Potter Estate, were originally restricted to residential use, and were designed with large open spaces surrounding them for the mutual benefit of all the properties of this development. The original houses, including the Potter Estate at 65-71 Walnut Park, survive today as important examples of early suburban residential development in nineteenth century Newton. Each of these properties are an important element in understanding the context of this early suburb's development.

B. Architectural Description

The Potter Estate today includes the mansion, caretaker's cottage and barn. This group of three buildings is set in large open grounds enclosed by large wrought iron gates and recent wire metal fencing. Along Washington Street is a high brick wall, which dates from the early twentieth century. With the exception of one tree planted at the northwest corner of the convent, all the trees on the property are planted along the lot's perimeter. A poorly maintained asphalt driveway runs through the property from Walnut Park to Washington Street. At the south side of the building is a small parking lot. The mansion, which was built in the 1860s, is an excellent example of an American Victorian home with the characteristic Second Empire feature of a Mansard Roof. The massive three story main section of this building is set on a foundation of cut granite, while its smaller additions rest on brick foundations. The walls have been covered in white vinyl siding, while the window, door and porch trim are all white painted wood. The roof is covered with tin on the porches, and slate over the main sections of the house. The porch was altered sometime between 1889 and 1913, as it was changed from two small porches at the front and rear entrances with an open terrace wrapping around the east, north and west sides of the building, to the present colonial revival porch which wraps around the east, north and west of the house. This porch has a pediment at the entrance, columns with ionic capitals, and glazing on part of the side and the rear. Ironwork on the roof, along with brackets along the cornice separating the second and third stories, and louvered shutters have all been removed. Architecturally, this building compliments the other houses of Walnut Park, which were built in the 1840s. This neighborhood serves as an encyclopedia of mid-nineteenth century American architecture, ranging from the Federal and Greek Revival styles, and ending with the Second Empire, which is represented by the Potter Estate.

VI. History of Property

A. Deed History

This property was purchased by John Sturgis Potter in 1858 from Ezra and A.H. Balchelder (Middlesex Registry of Deeds, book 802/pages 496-498). John Sturgis Potter sold the property to John C. Potter in 1862 (888/174). In 1891 Lucy Potter, the wife of John C. Potter, mortgaged the estate for \$25,000 to Martha R. Bayley (2147/571). Kate Flanagan purchased the property in July 1893 from Martha R. Bayley and Lucy Potter (2208/41). Kate Flanagan's husband Joseph left the estate to the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1921, which is documented by docket 134275 on file at the Middlesex Probate Court.

B. Development History

The land of the Potter estate was once part of the large tract of land owned by the Jackson Family, whose home is located at 527 Washington Street. William Jackson lived in the house at 527 Washington Street between 1820 and 1855. William Jackson established a candle factory on the property of the Potter Estate, which was located in the general vicinity of the present barn and caretaker's cottage. In 1844 William subdivided and sold part of his property for suburban residential development. Jackson hired landscape planner Alexander Wadsworth to design a suitable environment for this type of development, and created Waban Park and Walnut Park. It is for this period that this property is significant, as it marked the beginning of the City of Newton's importance as a suburb of Boston.

This property had a restriction placed on its deed which read, "...no building shall be erected or placed upon said lot of land within less than thirty feet of said street or avenue, and to the further condition that the only buildings to be erected or placed upon said lot to be dwelling houses and their appurtenances, exclusive of all yards, shops or other mechanical or manufacturing purposes." John C. Potter purchased the property in 1862, and by 1874 the mansion along, with a barn were standing at 65-71 Walnut Park. Potter was involved in the shoe and leather industry in Boston. Between 1874 and 1886 the parcel of the Potter Estate was enlarged to include land once owned by L. Coffin on Washington Street. The caretaker's cottage was built and the barn was enlarged during this same period.

In 1893 the property was bought by Kate T. Flanagan. Sometime between 1895 and 1917 Joseph F. Flanagan, a stockbroker, acquired the adjoining home located to the north of the Potter Estate, which was once the home of Calvin Bailey. In addition to this acquisition, the porch was altered and the present barn was built. Flanagan's obituary in the November 23, 1921 issue of the *Boston Transcript* described him as a retired stockbroker, well known for his charitable work. His estate in Newton was listed as one of his hobbies, where he had elaborate gardens, an exercise ring for his racing and show horses, a building that contained a large swimming pool, and many other "interesting" features. In 1921 this property was left to the Sisters of St. Joseph, and has been used as a convent ever since.

C. Historic Photographs

See attachments at end of report.

VII. Significance of Property

A. Period of Significance

The period for which this property is significant is the mid nineteenth century. In 1844 William Jackson subdivided and sold part of his property for

the purpose of suburban residential development. Jackson hired landscape planner Alexander Wadsworth to design a suitable environment for this type of development. Wadsworth created Walnut Park and nearby Waban park as his solution to Jackson's idea of a planned suburban residential neighborhood. This lot and all the others at Walnut Park had the following restriction placed on their deeds: "...no building shall be erected or placed upon said lot of land within less than thirty feet of said street or avenue, and to the further condition that the only buildings to be erected or placed upon said lot to be dwelling houses and their appurtenances, exclusive of all yards, shops or other mechanical or manufacturing purposes." The Second Empire Victorian Mansion of the Potter Estate was not built until sometime between 1862 and 1874. It is for this period that the property is significant, as it marked the beginning of the City of Newton's importance as a suburb as Boston. It was also during this period that the building gained and retained its architectural and historical significance.

B. Historical Significance

This property was originally part of the land owned by John Jackson, the first permanent settler of Newton. In anticipation of Newton becoming an important suburb of the City of Boston in the 1840s, William Jackson hired landscape planner Alexander Wadsworth to design a portion of his property for residential, suburban development. These areas became known as Waban Park and Walnut Park. Wadsworth was very well known in the Boston area during this time, as he was the designer of Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge. John C. Potter purchased the property in 1862, and by 1874 the mansion along, with a barn were standing at 65-71 Walnut Park. Potter was involved in the shoe and leather industry in Boston. Between 1874 and 1886 the parcel of the Potter Estate was enlarged to include land once owned by L. Coffin on Washington Street. The caretaker's cottage was built and the barn was enlarged during this same period.

In 1893 the property was bought by Kate T. Flanagan. Sometime between 1895 and 1917 Joseph F. Flanagan, a stockbroker, acquired the adjoining home located to the north of the Potter Estate, which was once the home of Calvin Bailey. In addition, the porch was altered and the present barn was built during this period. Joseph Flanagan left 65-71 Walnut Park to the Sisters of St. Joseph, who have used the Potter Mansion as a convent. The adjacent estate has become Aquinas College.

C. Architectural Significance

The site of the Potter estate is architecturally significant as it is part of the residential park designed by famed Boston landscape planner and engineer Alexander Wadsworth between 1844 and 1847. Wadsworth who lived from 1806-1898 was very well known in the Boston area during this period, as he designed Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge with Henry Dearborn. Wadsworth designed many picturesque and residential parks in the Boston area including Kenrick Park and Auburn Park in Newton. The Potter Estate compliments the other houses of Walnut Park which were built in the 1840s. This neighborhood serves as an encyclopedia of mid-nineteenth century American architecture, ranging from the Federal and Greek Revival styles, and ending with the Second Empire, which is represented by 65-71 Walnut Park. The mansion which was built in the 1860s is an excellent example of an American Victorian home with the characteristic Second Empire feature of a Mansard Roof. The massive three story main section of this building is set on a foundation of cut granite, while its smaller additions rest on brick foundations. The roof is covered with tin on the porches, and slate over the main sections of the house. The porch was altered sometime between 1889 and 1913, as it was changed from two small porches at the front and rear entrances with an open terrace wrapping around the east, north and west sides of the building, to the present colonial revival porch which wraps around the east, north and west of the house. This porch has a pediment at the entrance, columns with ionic capitals, and glazing on part of the side and the rear. Ironwork on the roof, along with brackets along the cornice separating the second and third stories, and louvered shutters have all been removed. Despite the fact of these alterations, the building and its setting still maintain much of its features and fabric from its period of significance.

D. Landmark Designation Criteria of Significance

65-71 Walnut Park is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, which makes this property an eligible Newton Landmark under ordinance T-288, section 22-92. This ordinance states:

All buildings, structures, landscapes and places currently on the National Register of Historic Sites or otherwise listed as eligible for said National Register as individual sites, not solely as parts of a historic district shall be eligible for landmark designation and preservation. No additional investigation and report on the historical and architectural significance of the buildings, structures, landscapes or places to be designated as a landmark shall be required for such sites.

Buildings and structures other than those currently listed individually on the National Register of Historic Sites or those listed as individually eligible for said National Register may be eligible for landmark designation and preservation if they possess historic characteristics sufficient to qualify for individual listing on the National Register as certified by the Massachusetts Historic Commission.

VIII. Recommendations

A. Preservation Recommendations

The historic context of Walnut park is paramount in understanding nineteenth century suburban residential development in the City of Newton. The Potter Estate is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is protected from the adverse effects of federally licensed, permitted, or funded projects and, through listing on the parallel State Register of Historic Places, from the adverse effects of state funded projects. At the local level, it is covered by the provisions of the city's zoning code.

The National and State Registers provide limited protection from public projects through review by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The zoning provisions establish maximum density and height standards and govern the allowable uses of the property. However, the Massachusetts Historical Commission's power do not allow for review of privately-funded projects, nor can the zoning code address any issues of building appearance. In neither case can the retention of a particular property be mandated.

Measures to preserve each contributing property is essential in preserving this historic context which the Potter Estate is part of. As a Newton Landmark under Ordinance T-288 will protect the important features of this property. By designating Walnut Park a local historic district under MGL Chapter 40C, future development of this area would be subject to review. Preservation easements under the provisions of MGL Chapter 184, would also be very valuable if applied to all buildings facing onto Walnut Park. The zoning should support the goal of preserving Walnut Park as a residential neighborhood, and should discourage development which would cause large scale change and destroy the historic context and open space of Walnut Park.

B. Important Features

The key features to be preserved at 65-71 Walnut Park include the vast open grounds surrounding the three buildings, the wrought iron gates, wire metal fencing and brick wall which enclose the property, and the slate Mansard roof.

C. Further Research

Archaeological research on this property, specifically the area near where the caretaker's cottage and barn is located, may be valuable in learning more about the early history of the property, when a candle factory stood at this site in the first half of the nineteenth century.

IX. Standards for Design Review

The important features of this property are all subject to review under section 22-96:

In passing upon matters before it, the Commission shall consider, among other things :

(a) In general: (1) the historical and architectural value, and significance of the building, structure, landscape, or place; (2) the general design, arrangement, texture, material, and color of the features involved; and (3) the relation of such features to similar features of buildings and structures in the surrounding area.

(b) In the case of new construction or additions to existing buildings or structures: the appropriateness of the size, shape, and location of the building or structure, both in relation to the land area upon which the building or structure is situated and to buildings and structures in the vicinity.

(c) In the case of demolition or removal: (1) whether the demolition or removal of a building or structure of such architectural or historic significance would impair the public interest and the general welfare of the people of the city, town, or state; (2) whether the demolition or removal of the building or structure would undermine the purpose and intent of this ordinance and the objectives of local preservation plans; (3) whether the building or structure has so deteriorated that preservation or restoration is not structurally or economically feasible, provided that the owner's self-created hardship or failure to maintain the property in good repair shall not qualify as a basis for the issuance of a certificate of hardship.

The Commission shall not make any recommendations or requirements except for the purpose of preventing developments incongruous to the historical or architectural characteristics of a building, structure, landscape or site, or their surroundings.

The commission may impose dimensional and set-back requirements in addition to those required by the applicable ordinance or by-law.

Specific design standards lead to the preservation of the property with regard to height, proportion of windows and doors, scale and architectural detail. Such principles should be applied in developing a design for changes and in reviewing proposed changes, such that the key features retain their prominence and the building continues to stand out as an excellent example of the period of construction. Any discovery of documentation of historic fabric should be used in planning appropriate alterations or preservation.

Exterior Walls

- No new openings should be allowed.
- No existing openings should be filled so that the original opening is not recognizable. Thus a change in an existing opening should be done in such a fashion as to still read as an opening.
- Replacement of vinyl siding with wood would enhance the integrity and aesthetic of the building and would be entirely appropriate.

Windows

- All windows should be preserved if possible. Recent use of the bi-glass system to improve weather resistant quality was appropriate.
- Original window design and arrangement of openings should be retained.
- Deteriorated and missing window elements and architectural features should be replaced with material and elements which match the original in material, texture, size, shape, profile, configuration and detail of installation.

Entrances/Doors

- The original entrance design and arrangement of door openings should be retained.
- When replacement is necessary, it should be based on physical and documentary evidence.

Roof

- Roof elements and shape should be preserved. This is a critical element of this property.

- Slate shingles should be retained however consideration of a heavy textured shingle may be considered.

Addition

- New additions should be designed so that the character defining features of this building are not radically changed, obscured, damaged or destroyed.
- New additions should be designed so that they are differentiated from the original fabric
- New additions should be located at the rear of the building where there are fewer defining features.

X. Notification

A. Owners, Abutters, Etc.

This Property is abutted by the following properties:

46 Walnut Park, Luka & Donica Pananti
 62 Walnut Park, Yvonne & Ronald Paglia
 80 Walnut Park, Beverly Farago
 88 Walnut Park, Anna & Donald Mackay
 36 Walnut Park, Robert Fast
 84 Walnut Park, Sandi Farago
 58 Walnut Park, Tony & Jeanette Paglia

SOURCES

Birnbaum, Charles A. ed. *Pioneers of American Landscape Design II: An Annotated Bibliography*, Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior. 1995

The Boston Transcript, November 23, 1921.

Dall, Caroline. *In Memoriam: Alexander Wadsworth*. Boston: West Church, 1898.

The Friends of the Jackson Homestead, Inc., *Newton's Older Houses*, 1976.

The Jackson Homestead, *The Jackson Journal*, Vol. 25 1977.

The Jackson Homestead, *The Jacksons and Their Homestead*, 1984.

Newton, Garden City of the Commonwealth, 1902.

Newton Graphic Publishing Co., *Beautiful Newton*, 1913.

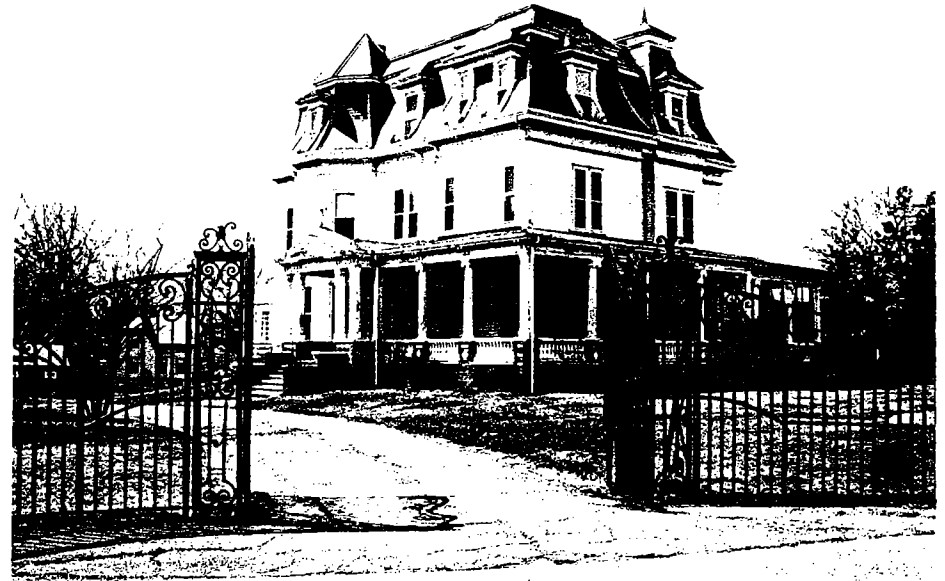
Newton Historical Commission, Potter Estate File.

Sweetser, M.F. *King's Handbook of Newton*, 1889.

Wadsworth, Horace Andrew. *250 Years of the Wadsworth Family in America*. Lawrence, MA: Eagle Steam Job Printing Rooms, 1883.



WEST/NORTHWEST ELEVATION



NORTH + EAST ELEVATION

65-71 Walnut Park

NORTH ELEVATION

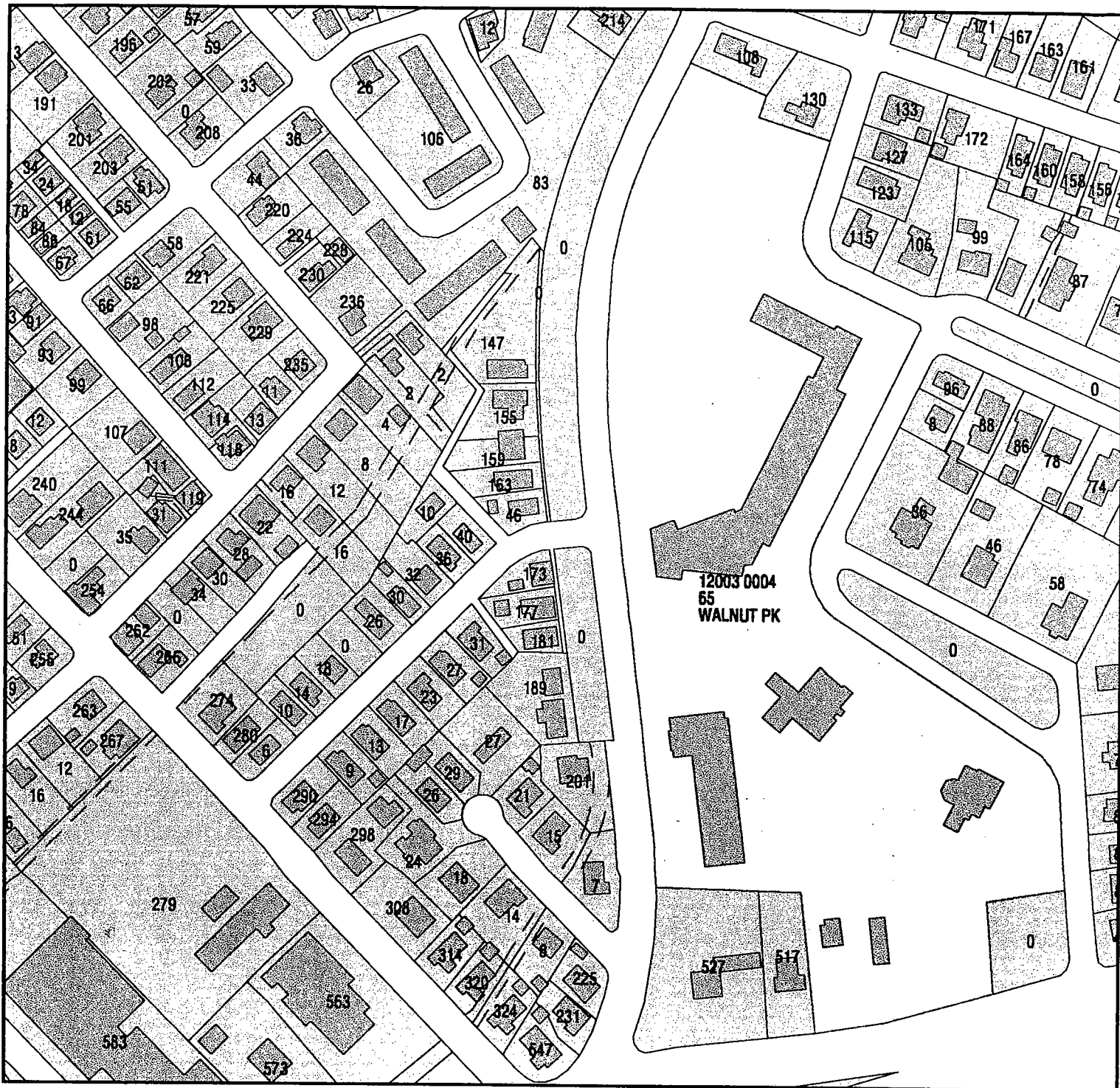


SOUTH ELEVATION



HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS AND MAPS

Sbl-id	Address	Draft Map, Not a Legal Document		Map-ld	Zone	LU	Sq-ft
		S-date	Sale-price				
12003 0004	65 WALNUT PK	0	0	019SW	MR1	906	531429



Assessor's Base Map

Map Produced on: April 24, 1997

Property boundaries from Newton Assessor's property maps
Zoning or land use information from Assessor's CAMA database
Map projection & coordinate system: Massachusetts State Plane - NAD83

CITY OF
NEWTON
MASSACHUSETTS
ASSESSING DEPARTMENT
1000 COMMONWEALTH AVE.
NEWTON CENTRE, MA 02159

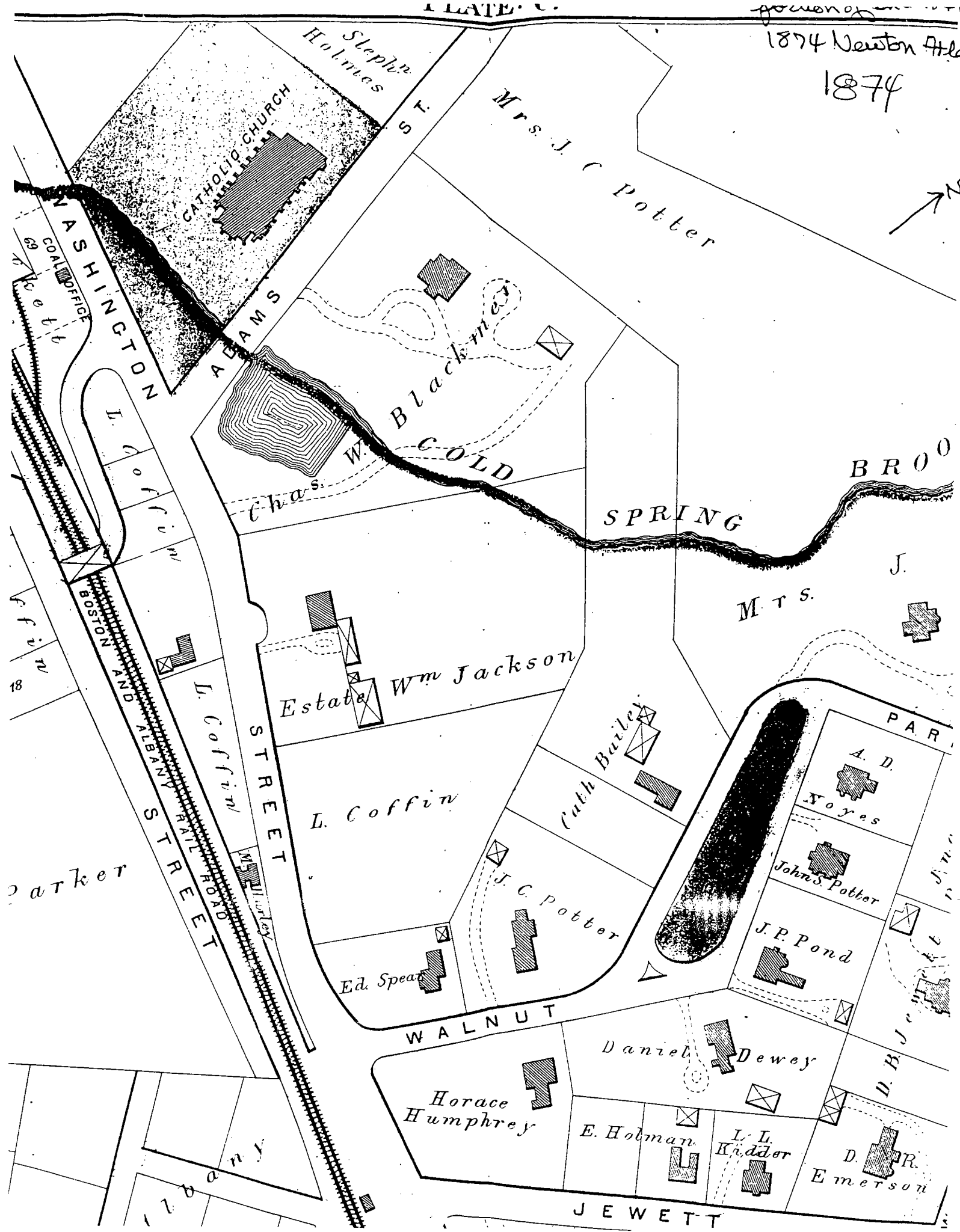
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Parcels labeled with Lot Number

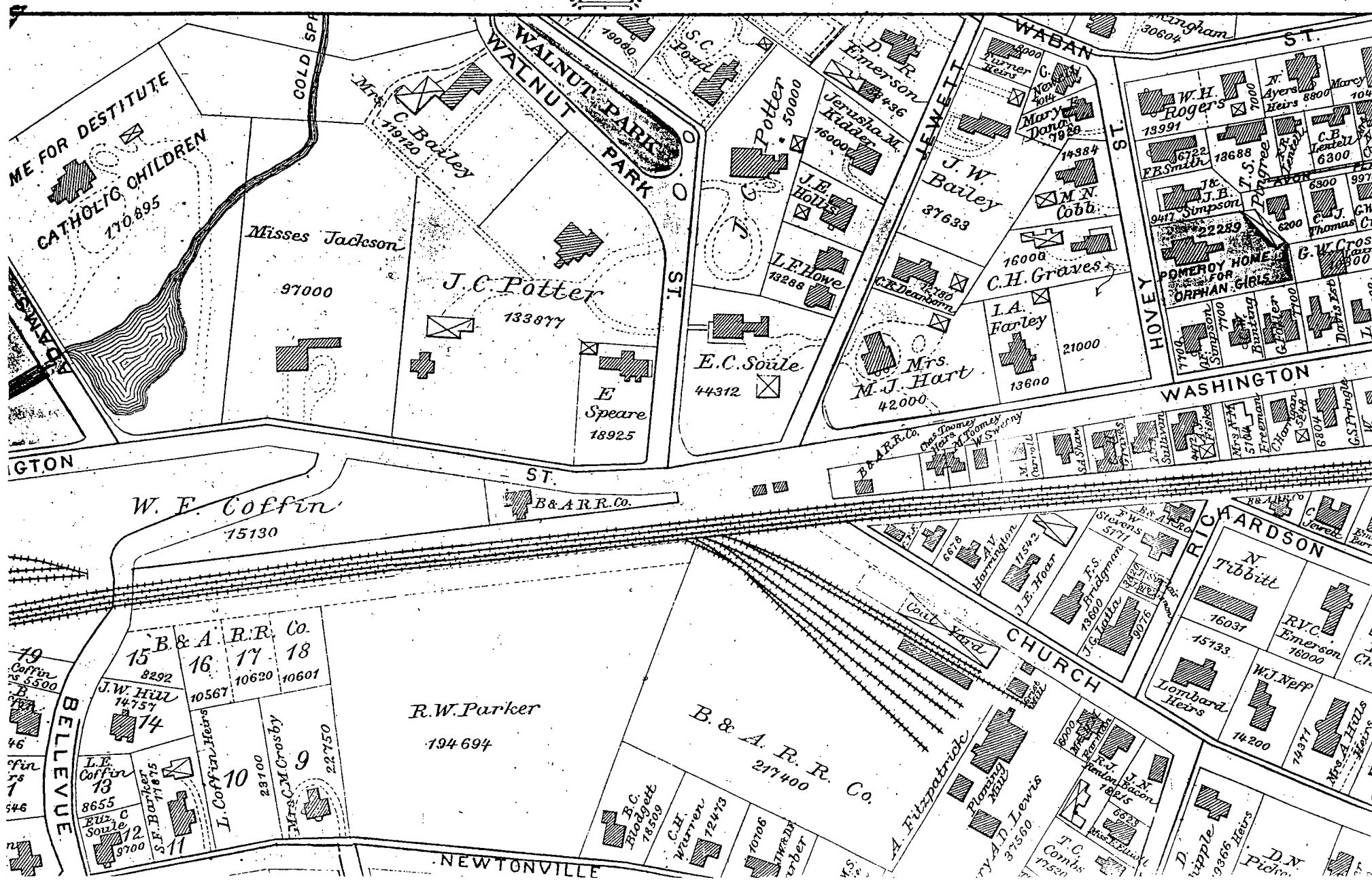
1874 Newton Athl

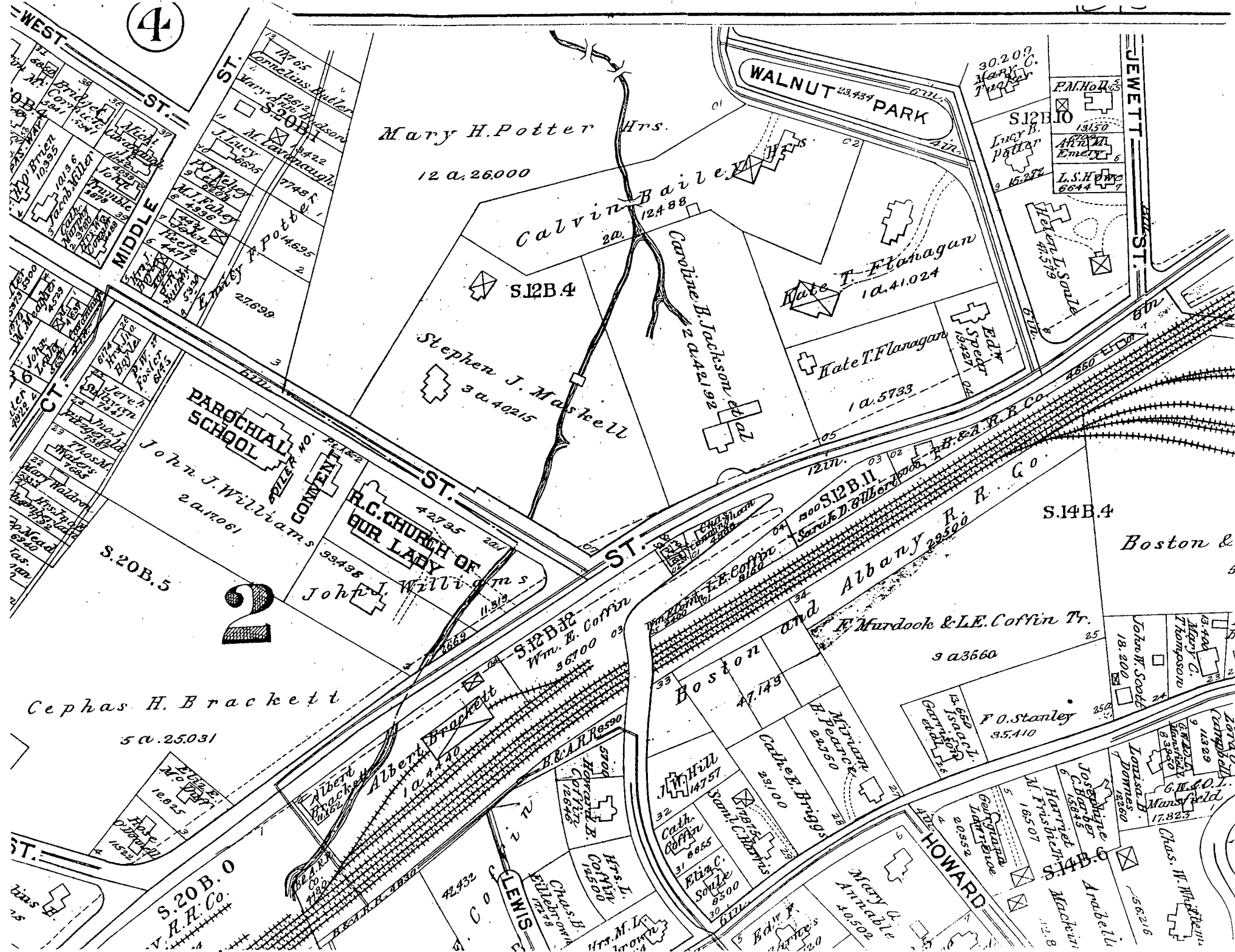
1874



SEE SECTION **G** for ADJACENT MAP.

1884

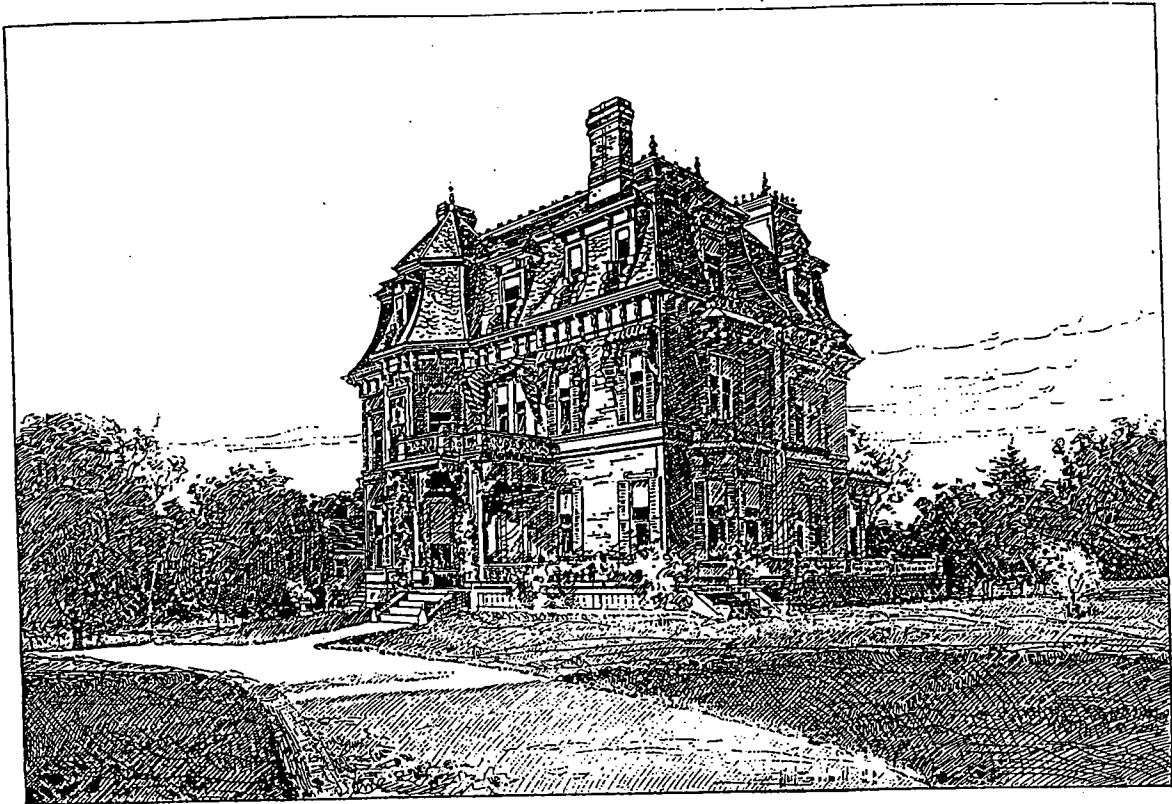




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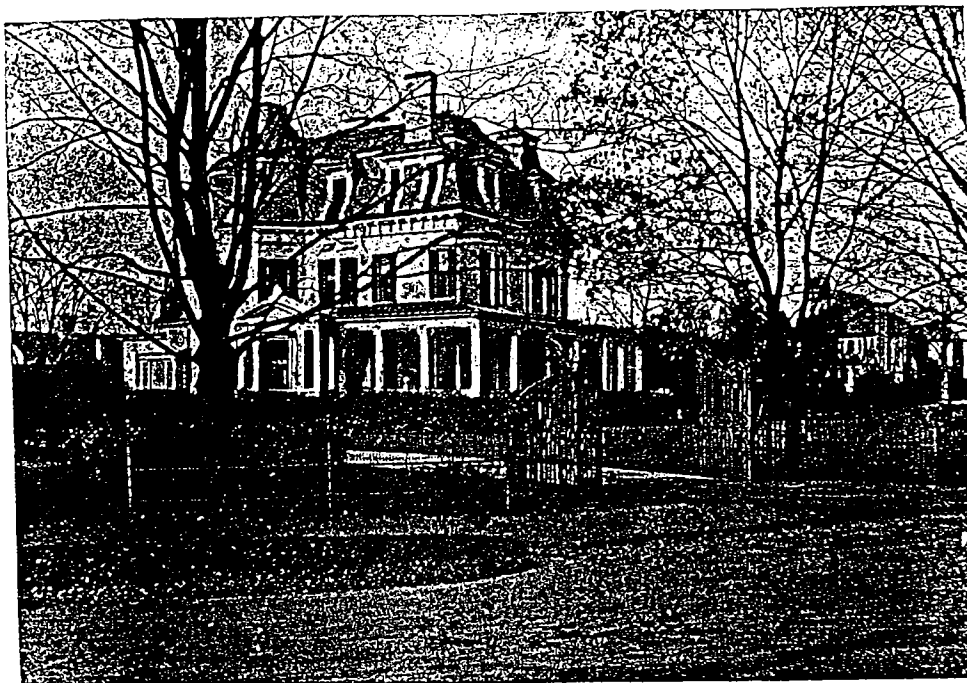
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THE RESIDENCE OF JOHN C POTTER.
Walnut Park. Newton.

THE POTTER ESTATE, 1889.

From: M.F. Sweetser, *King's Handbook of Newton*, 1889.



RESIDENCE OF JOSEPH F. FLANAGAN, WALNUT PARK, NEWTON.

THE POTTER ESTATE, 1913.

From: *Beautiful Newton*, Newton, MA: Newton Graphic Publishing Co.,
1913.